

John Longden Houses
105 and 107 S. Royal Street
Alexandria
Virginia

HABS No. VA-685

HABS
VA
7-ALEX,
164-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

JOHN LONGDEN HOUSES

HABS
VA
7-ALEX
164-

Location: 105 and 107 S. Royal Street, Alexandria, Virginia

Present Owner: Demolished in 1968 by the Alexandria Redevelopment Housing Authority as part of an urban renewal project in the old commercial center of Alexandria.

Statement of Significance: These two adjoining buildings were associated with a prominent Alexandrian during the heyday of the city as a port. Later alterations to the facades conceal what were likely buildings of the traditional Federal genre. They are two of three buildings associated with John Longden on this block and separated from the third by one building. (See HABS report on the John Longden House at 111 S. Royal Street, VA-689.)

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Sometime between 1787 and 1790.

John Longden acquired the site of 105 S. Royal Street from David Young on July 8, 1784, for an annual ground rent of 40 Spanish milled dollars. On December 6, 1789, Longden, for 800 Spanish milled dollars, obtained a release from Young from further payment of the ground rent.

On January 13, 1786, William Young conveyed to John Longden a lot of ground adjoining the site of 105 S. Royal Street on the south, this lot fronting 30 feet on Royal Street. A few months later, on April 18, 1787, Longden conveyed the southern 15 feet of this 30 feet frontage to Samuel Simmonds, retaining the northern 15 feet, which became the site of 107 S. Royal Street.

By December of 1790, Simmonds had built a brick house on his lot (later 109 S. Royal Street; see HABS report VA-684). It is possible, therefore, that between 1787 and 1790, three small brick houses were going up on the sites of 105, 107, and 109 S. Royal Street.

2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: In his will, as drawn on October 4, 1825, Longden left "to my grandson, Edgar

Snowden, the brick house and lot on the west side of Royal Street now occupied by his father," and "to my granddaughter, Julia Ann Longden, the brick tenement and lot of ground . . . adjoining on the south the brick house above devised to Edgar Snowden." Thus Edgar Snowden received 105 S. Royal Street, and Julia Ann Longden, 107 S. Royal Street.

Edgar Snowden obtained 107 S. Royal Street from his cousin in 1838 and in 1842 the Snowdens conveyed the two brick houses, 105 and 107 S. Royal Street, both "in the occupancy of William N. Berkeley," to James Pattison for \$2,000.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

According to the Lodge of Washington, John Longden's father, Thomas Longden, died with Braddock in the expedition of 1755, and John, himself, when he died in 1830, was the oldest survivor of "Light Horse Harry" Lee's Legion. John Longden's obituary, in the Phenix Gazette of April 1, 1830, does not mention his military services--"DIED, yesterday, in the 76th year of his age, John Longden, one of the oldest and most esteemed of our citizens . . ." However, the Alexandria Daily Gazette of June 12, 1809, carried John Longden's offer to sell a warrant for 696 acres of land granted by the State of Virginia for military services during the Revolutionary War.

Longden was active in civic affairs. He served for some years as president of the Mechanical Relief Society (founded in 1795); as clerk of the Market, 1804-1806; as Superintendent of Police, 1808-1811, 1812, and 1819; as a Commissioner of the new Mechanics Bank in 1812, and later as a Director of this Bank; as a Director of the Domestic Manufactures Company in 1813; and also in 1813, as one of the two members from Ward II of the Committee of Vigilance appointed by the Common Council, and as a second lieutenant of the Alexandria Artillery Grays.

Samuel Snowden, came to Alexandria after the end of the Revolutionary War and became the editor and proprietor of the newspaper which later became the Alexandria Gazette. On March 3, 1800, Samuel Snowden married John Longden's daughter Nancy. It appears that Snowden's newspaper at one time occupied the house which his son Edgar would eventually inherit.

The Alexandria Daily Advertiser of June 17, 1807, announced: "The Office of the Alexandria Daily Advertiser is removed to Royal Street a few doors south of King Street." It is probable

that the office was established in 105 S. Royal Street. On October 1, 1814, the Alexandria Gazette--Commercial and Political announced: "The Office of the Gazette has removed to the east side of Royal Street, opposite to the house in which it has hitherto been kept." The new location was probably on a part of the site now occupied as a parking lot by the Alexandria National Bank, because Joseph Ingle, who owned the property which later became 112 S. Royal Street (part of which is still standing) advertised it for sale or rent on January 28, 1817, describing it as being "three doors below the office of Samuel Snowden."

C. Bibliography:

Alexandria Will Book 3, Orphans' Court, p. 366; Fairfax Deed Books O-1, p. 359; Q-1, p. 314 and 318; Alexandria Deed Books N (Hustings) p. 186 and p. 184; H-3, p. 233; Z-2, p. 199; B-3, p. 352.

Early newspapers as cited.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

The original Federal facades of these adjoining rowhouses were transformed c. 1885-1895 into brick facades characteristic of the late nineteenth century, with moulded bricks, incised detailing, and corbelled cornice.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Two stories, two bays for each of the adjoining buildings.
2. Chimneys: Two interior end chimneys for each.
3. Openings: An arched passageway runs between 107 and 109 S. Royal Street.

C. Description of Interior:

Side-hall plan.

D. Site:

The buildings faced east and were flush with the other combined commercial/residential buildings that lined the Royal Street extension of the main King Street thoroughfare.

Prepared by Mrs. Hugh B. Cox of
The Historic Alexandria
Foundation
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Edited by
Antoinette J. Lee
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken in 1968 to document the commercial and residential buildings in downtown Alexandria which were to be demolished in an urban renewal project. The project was cosponsored by the Historic Alexandria Foundation and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Mrs. Hugh B. Cox was the historian and George Eisenman supplied the photographs. The material was edited and updated in 1975 by Antoinette J. Lee, working on contract for HABS.